



# TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

## JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Christmas Mountains to become open-air classroom** ***Texas State University System accepts land donation***

AUSTIN — Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson and Texas State University System Chancellor Brian McCall today announced the transfer of the Christmas Mountains to the Texas State University System. The rugged and remote 9,269-acre tract of land in Brewster County will become an outdoor classroom, open to all — including hunters — with conservation of the land guaranteed forever.

“The Texas State University System will make great use of this property,” Patterson said. “Transforming the Christmas Mountains into an open-air classroom in the Texas State University System accomplishes my original goal of not only ensuring expert conservation of this pristine corner of Texas, but preserving thousands of acres of wild, open space for Texas hunters.”

McCall said the Christmas Mountains will be a tremendous asset for The Texas State University System. “All of our universities are engaged in research in the Big Bend region and, as a result of this transfer, we’ll be able to provide new and exciting learning opportunities for students and faculty in biology, geology, archeology wildfire management and many other fields,” McCall said. “We also recognize that this land was a gift to the people of Texas, so we will continue to allow members of the public to access the Christmas Mountains so they can enjoy this natural treasure.”

Patterson said the value of the Christmas Mountains was offset by the value of the university system’s educational goals and commitment to conservation for the property. “In fact, I think Texans will be richer for the opportunity to study in a Texas-sized open-air classroom this vast” Patterson said.

Several of the university system’s top academics from nearby Sul Ross State University, Sam Houston State University and Lamar University are already planning new research efforts for the land. The Christmas Mountains offers an extraordinary opportunity for both graduate and undergraduate students at nearby Sul Ross State University to study the bears, mule deer and Bighorn sheep and a diversity of birds and lizards who all call the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem home.

Sul Ross geologists are also eager to explore outcroppings of volcanic rock in the area — among some of the oldest in the Big Bend region — to see what secrets they can reveal about the area 42 million years ago. Other ancient secrets may be hidden in the hills as well. Archeologists with Sul Ross’ Center for Big Bend Studies have already pushed back the earliest known date for human activity in the region by more than 1,000 years through finds on a nearby ranch. These same archeologists think the Christmas Mountains may contain many unfound archeological sites.

Sam Houston State University’s Center for Biological Field Studies, which examines climate change and sustainability issues, is interested in establishing a long-term ecological monitoring site in the area. Lamar University researchers have already studied the area’s plants, small mammals and reptile populations for years, and expect to be able to expand their studies in the higher elevations of the Christmas Mountains. And Texas State University’s biology, geography and anthropology departments, as well as Center for the Study of the Southwest, all have eyes on the property.

“There’s a lot to learn from the Christmas Mountains,” Patterson said. “I’m excited to see what they’ll discover next.”

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